I remember my own first Good Friday moment very clearly. It was a crisp fall evening my eighth grade year, and I came home from soccer practice to find my father packing his things. A sick feeling in my stomach gripped me, and I was paralyzed--paralyzed by a yearning, an incredibly intense yearning, to go back in time just 3 minutes…3 seconds even—before my entire reality shattered in front of me and I was left looking at a completely unfamiliar life. A life of a child whose parents, despite repeated assurances that they would never get divorced, were separated. I felt like the walls were closing in around me. I felt trapped in a new reality, and could see no way out.

Have you had a moment when your world changed radically, forever? A moment when the breath just went right out of you, and all you wanted was to go back in time? When do you remember your life just…vaporizing…because of the loss of someone or something else?

This was my first Good Friday moment. You might think I am calling it a Good Friday moment because it was sad, and almost violent in the shock it produced in me. Or because I was suffering. These are things we associate with Good Friday. But those aren’t why I think of it as a Good Friday moment.

It was a Good Friday moment because I realized, for the first time, and with undeniable clarity, that my life was inescapably connected to the lives of those around me. It was a Good Friday moment because I was forced to acknowledge that, as a child of God created to be in relationship, I was necessarily vulnerable. It is yet another paradox of the life of faith. This sort of moment, where a relationship is altered far beyond the familiar, or severed all together, makes us realize how interconnected all of our lives are. For me, this realization is what Jesus’ death and Good Friday are all about.

As I have experienced it, there are two reactions we can have to realizing that we are connected to all those around us. The first is to try to protect ourselves from it. Jesus could have done that. He had opportunities to flee, to disappear. Fleeing, though, would have discredited all he had fought for in his ministry. The suffering, the excluded, the completely forgotten ones of ancient Israel had watched Jesus’ healing touch restore others just like them to full participation in their communities—they had watched Jesus fight with religious and political leaders on their behalf. Had Jesus run for it, he would have communicated God’s own abandonment of these most isolated individuals. Protecting himself would have denied the reality that as a human person, his own peace and fulfillment, his own ability to fully be the person God called him to be, was tied up in the ability of those around him to do the same.

The second reaction to realizing that we are all connected is to accept it. To see our vulnerability as the divine mark of our ability to love—not just to feel love, but to act in love. This is the reaction Jesus chose. This was God’s will. Not that Jesus should die a painful and humiliating death. What God willed, is that Jesus, right to the last, should stand in love for all people, even when that commitment to love made him vulnerable even to death. Good Friday, then, is not about glorifying Jesus’ suffering. Good Friday is about glorifying Jesus’ persistence in loving relationship.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Jesus who reacts in complete acceptance of his relationships with all Creation, is the Jesus we meet on Good Friday every year. Good Friday is not like Palm Sunday. We do not cycle through the other Gospel accounts. On Good Friday, the day in which we face, head on, Jesus’ death, we *always* hear John’s Gospel. Unlike in the other Gospel accounts, where we see Jesus’ own fear at his impending death, in John’s Gospel, Jesus goes to his death without hesitation. He even mocks the other Gospel accounts which have him grieved, feeling abandoned by God. Here, Jesus does not cry out, “My God, my God, why have your forsaken me,” but instead says, “Am I not to drink the cup the Father has given me?” The Jesus we are given to walk with to his death this night…every year…is a Jesus whose understanding of his interrelatedness to all people and to God is so complete that he does not perceive his death as one in which he has been abandoned. Rather, John’s Jesus allows his death to proclaim the very opposite—to reveal the truth that we are all tied to each other, bound by the love of God, and through it, bound to love.

God has given me, and each of us, all Creation, in fact, this same interconnection—Relationality—Deep ties to each other that negate the possibility that any of us will ever truly be isolated. We may feel isolated, alone, trapped—but on Good Friday, we bury the belief that this is reality, and begin to take our first steps into living into the true reality that we live in relation to each other. Just as for Jesus, to drink this cup as fully as we can is the vocation of humanity.

So, on this night, I am brought back to that first, halting realization that my own sense of peace, fulfillment, ability to become fully the person God wants me to be, is tied to my father’s ability to be fully who God has called him to be, and my mother’s, sister’s, brother’s ability to do the same…and since then, my husband’s ability, my children’s ability, now, all of your abilities …wider and wider…the homeless man I see every single time I walk from the subway to school...those without medical care in Haiti, whom we will hear about again from our mission team in just a few weeks—my self, at its deepest center, is *restless* with the knowledge that there are people, even so far from me, that cannot claim the full riches of the life to which God has called them.

This is not to say that in the midst of other’s pain and struggling we should not find our center, our own sense of peace and direction. Or that we should not take into consideration our own needs and wants. Rather, it is to acknowledge that the very deepest part of ourselves, the well of compassion and love which is God in us, will never be able to fully inhabit us, until all of us are able to live as God has created us to live.

This realization was the most profoundly disturbing part of my parents’ divorce. Trying to ignore it, I fought valiantly for control. As many of you know, I slid into anorexia, an illness which strives for isolation—attempts to build a wall of protection. But, eventually, I had to ask for help, I had to connect.

And…acknowledging that I had been created for relationship was what saved my life. Though initially experienced as death, a locked tomb with no way out, living into my Good Friday realization that I was created for interdependence became the very wellspring of life for me. Reengaging with family and friends, refashioning my understanding of my self to claim the deep joy and fulfillment which comes from engaging with others in Jesus’ call for love and justice, this was what nurtured me back to health. I have come to see that shocking moment of realization as a profound moment of grace.

I don’t want to go back to how things were, even if I could. My father is more fully God’s creature; my mother, now, too. My siblings and I, each more able to live a life of active loving than if my parents had stayed married. We are each loving more deeply than would have been possible had those parts of us seeking to live without vulnerability had not died because of that night. Those Good Friday moments—those moments when we realize or remember our own interdependence with startling clarity, are required for us to be fully ourselves. Those moments are required in order to have the courage, the conviction, and the commitment to love *actively*—to advocate for the freedom of ourselves and all those around us and beyond us. I have experienced that moment many, many times since. A death of independence to rise to a new life of interdependence.

So, I invite you, again, to consider your own Good Friday moments. Can you see them as Holy moments?

This night, may our feelings of isolation die. This night, may all of our efforts to shield ourselves from the vulnerability of being in relationship die. And may we prepare to rise again, in loving solidarity with Christ, each other and all of the Created order. AMEN.

[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. This particular phrasing provided by the Rev. Christopher Wendell [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The notion that Jesus did not suffer, but instead, went to his death willingly comes, in part, from my reading of the New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary [↑](#footnote-ref-2)